

LUCY PARSONS



**"NEVER BE DECEIVED THAT THE RICH WILL
ALLOW YOU TO VOTE AWAY THEIR WEALTH."**

Lucy Parsons (1853-1942)



Little is known about the early life of Lucy Parsons. She claimed to have been born the daughter of a Mexican women, Marie del Gather and John Waller, a Creek Indian, and orphaned at age three. From there she said she was raised on a ranch in Texas by her maternal uncle. However, later research has pointed to the possibility that she was a slave in Texas. Around 1870 she met Albert Parsons, a former Confederate soldier turned radical Republican and married him in either 1871 or 1872.

Lucy Parsons was a respected writer and powerful orator known throughout the United States and around the world. Much of Lucy's writings appeared in the *Alarm*, a revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist newspaper edited by her husband, Albert, and founded by the International Working People's Association, of which Lucy was a member.

She also briefly published and wrote for *Freedom*, in which she scorned racism and lynchings, and the *Liberator*, in which she emphasized famous women. In 1889 she published *The Life of Albert Parsons*, dedicated to exposing the state's crime of executing her husband and their comrades for their beliefs in anarchism. Although she frequently wrote for various publications, Lucy Parsons was most widely known for her inspiring and moving speeches, which provoked the police to repeatedly arrest her and silence her revolutionary voice.

Unlike many of her activist associates and allies, Lucy spent very little time writing or talking about herself and her personal life. Parsons believed it was the causes she championed, the movements she supported and the struggles against injustice that were of paramount importance, and saw little purpose in publicizing her own life. As a result we are left with few autobiographical resources concerning the life of Lucy Parsons.

Unfortunately the vast array of writings, speeches and other accounts of Lucy Parsons' commitment to the movements she was a part of are also far and few between. Much of her writings for the *Alarm*, her personal journals, letters and other history burned with Lucy when her house caught fire and ended her life in 1942. The remaining letters, writings and other documents of Lucy Parsons were promptly confiscated and eliminated by the authorities.

"Her long and often traumatic experience of the capitalist injustice system—from the KKK terror in her youth, through Haymarket and the judicial murder of her husband, to the US government's war on the Wobblies—made her not 'just another victim' but an extraordinarily articulate witness to, and vehement crusader against, all injustice."

—Gale Ahrens

"Lucy Parsons' personae and historical role provide material for the makings of a truly exemplary figure.....anarchist, labor organizer, writer, editor, publisher, and dynamic speaker, a woman of color of mixed black, Mexican and Native American heritage, a founder of the 1880s Chicago Working Women's Union that organized garment workers, called for equal pay for equal work, and even invited housewives to join with the demand of wages for housework; and later (1905) co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which made the organizing of women and people of color a priority..... For a better understanding of the concept of direct action and its implications, no other historical figure can match the lessons provided by Lucy Parsons."

—Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

OPEN LECTURE BY LUCY PARSONS:

Comrades and Friends:

I think I cannot open my address more appropriately than by stating my experience in my long connection with the reform movement.

It was during the great railroad strike of 1877 that I first became interested in what is known as the "Labor Question." I then thought as many thousands of earnest, sincere people think, that the aggregate power, operating in human society, known as government, could be made an instrument in the hands of the oppressed to alleviate their sufferings. But a closer study of the origin, history and tendency of governments, convinced me that this was a mistake; I came to understand how organized governments used their concentrated power to retard progress by their ever-ready means of silencing the voice of discontent if raised in vigorous protest against the machinations of the scheming few, who always did, always will and always must rule in the councils of nations where majority rule is recognized as the only means of adjusting the affairs of the people. I came to understand that such concentrated power can be always wielded in the interest of the few and at the expense of the many. Government in its last analysis is this power reduced to a science. Governments never lead; they follow progress. When

the prison, stake or scaffold can no longer silence the voice of the protesting minority, progress moves on a step, but not until then.

I will state this contention in another way: I learned by close study that it made no difference what fair promises a political party, out of power might make to the people in order to secure their confidence, when once securely established in control of the affairs of society that they were after all but human with all the human attributes of the politician. Among these are: First, to remain in power at all hazards; if not individually, then those holding essentially the same views as the administration must be kept in control. Second, in order to keep in power, it is necessary to build up a powerful machine; one strong enough to crush all opposition and silence all vigorous murmurs of discontent, or the party machine might be smashed and the party thereby lose control.

When I came to realize the faults, failings, shortcomings, aspirations and ambitions of fallible man, I concluded that it would not be the safest nor best policy for society, as a whole, to entrust the management of all its affairs, with all their manifold deviations and ramifications in the hands of finite man, to be managed by the party which happened to come into power, and therefore was the majority party, nor did it ten, nor does it now make one particle of difference to me what a party, out of power may promise; it does not tend to allay my fears of a party, when entrenched and securely seated in power might do to crush opposition, and silence the voice of the minority, and thus retard the onward step of progress.

My mind is appalled at the thought of a political party having control of all the details that go to make up the sum total of our lives. Think of it for an instant, that the party in power shall have all authority to dictate the kind of books that shall be used in our schools and universities, government officials editing, printing, and circulating our literature, histories, magazines and press, to say nothing of the thousand and one activities of life that a people engage in, in a civilized society.

To my mind, the struggle for liberty is too great and the few steps we have gained have been won at too great a sacrifice, for the great mass of the people of this 20th century to consent to turn over to any political party the management of our social and industrial affairs. For all who are at all familiar with history know that men will abuse power when they possess it, for these and other reasons, I, after careful study, and not through sentiment, turned from a sincere, earnest, political Socialist to the non-political phase of Socialism, Anarchism, because in its philosophy I believe I can find the proper conditions for the fullest development of the individual units in society, which can never be the case under government restrictions.

The philosophy of anarchism is included in the word "Liberty"; yet it is comprehensive enough to include all things else that are conducive to progress. No barriers whatever to human progression, to thought, or investigation are placed by anarchism; nothing is considered so true or so certain, that future discoveries may not prove it false; therefore, it has but one infallible, unchangeable motto, "Freedom." Freedom to discover any truth, freedom to develop, to live naturally and fully. Other schools of thought are composed of crystallized ideas-principles that are caught and impaled between the planks of long platforms, and considered too sacred to be disturbed by a close investigation. In all other "issues" there is always a limit; some imaginary boundary line beyond which the searching mind dare not penetrate, lest some pet idea melt into a myth. But anarchism is the usher of science-the master of ceremonies to all forms of truth. It would remove all barriers between the human being and natural development. From the natural resources of the earth, all artificial restrictions, that the body might be nurtured, and from universal truth, all bars of prejudice and superstition, that the mind may develop symmetrically.

Anarchists know that a long period of education must precede any great fundamental change in society, hence they do not believe in vote begging, nor political campaigns, but rather in the development of self-thinking individuals.

We look away from government for relief, because we know that force (legalized) invades the personal liberty of man, seizes upon the natural elements and intervenes between man and natural laws; from this exercise of force through governments flows nearly all the misery, poverty, crime and confusion existing in society.

So, we perceive, there are actual, material barriers blockading the way. These must be removed. If we could hope they would melt away, or be voted or prayed into nothingness, we would be content to wait and vote and pray. But they are like great frowning rocks towering between us and a land of freedom, while the dark chasms of a hard-fought past yawn behind us. Crumbling they may be with their own weight and the decay of time, but to quietly stand under until they fall is to be buried in the crash. There is something to be done in a case like this-the rocks must be removed. Passivity while slavery is stealing over us is a crime. For the moment we must forget that we are anarchists-when the work is accomplished we may forget that we were revolutionists-hence most anarchists believe the coming change can only come through a revolution, because the possessing class will not allow a peaceful change to take place; still we are willing to work for peace at any price, except at the price of liberty.

And what of the glowing beyond that is so bright that those who grind the faces of the poor say it is a dream? It is no dream, it is the real, stripped of brain-distortions materialized into thrones and scaffolds, mitres and guns. It is nature acting on her own interior laws as in all her other associations. It is a return to first principles; for were not the land, the water, the light, all free before governments took shape and form? In this free state we will again forget to think of these things as "property." It is real, for we, as a race, are growing up to it. The idea of less restriction and more liberty, and a confiding trust that nature is equal to her work, is permeating all modern thought. From the dark year-not so long gone by-when it was generally believed that man's soul was totally depraved and every human impulse bad; when every action, every thought and every emotion was controlled and restricted; when the human frame, diseased, was bled, dosed, suffocated and kept as far from nature's remedies as possible; when the mind was seized upon and distorted before it had time to evolve a natural thought-from those days to these years the progress of this idea has been swift and steady. It is becoming more and more apparent that in every way we are "governed best where we are governed least."

Still unsatisfied perhaps, the inquirer seeks for details, for ways and means, and whys and wherefores. How ill we go on like human beings eating and sleeping, working and loving, exchanging and dealing, without government? So used have we become to "organized authority" in every department of life that ordinarily we cannot conceive of the most common-place avocations being carried on without their interference and "protection." But anarchism is not compelled to outline a complete organization of a free society. To do so with any assumption of authority would be to place another barrier in the way of coming generations. The best thought of today may become the useless vagary of tomorrow, and to crystallize it into a creed is to make it unwieldy.

We judge from experience that man is a gregarious animal, and instinctively affiliates with his kind co-operates, unites in groups, works to better advantage, combined with his fellow men than when alone. This would point to the formation of co-operative communities, of which our present trades-unions are embryonic patterns. Each branch of industry will no doubt have its own organization, regulations, leaders, etc.; it will institute methods of direct communications with every member of that industrial branch in the world, and establish equitable relations with all other branches. There would probably be conventions of industry which delegates would attend, and where they would transact such business as was necessary, adjourn and from that moment be delegates no longer, but simply members of a group. To remain permanent members of a continuous congress would be to establish a power that is certain soon or later to be abused.

No great, central power, like a congress consisting of men who know nothing of their constituents' trades, interests, rights or duties, would be over the various organizations or groups; nor would they employ sheriffs, policemen, courts or jailers to enforce the conclusions arrived at while in session. The members of groups might profit by the knowledge gained through mutual interchange of thought afforded by conventions if they choose, but they will not be compelled to do so by any outside force.

Vested rights, privileges, charters, title deeds, upheld by all the paraphernalia of government-the visible symbol of power-such as prison, scaffold and armies will have no existence. There can be no privileges bought or sold, and the transaction kept sacred at the point of the bayonet. Every man will stand on an equal footing with his brother in the race of life, and neither chains of economic thralldom nor metal drags of superstition shall handicap the one to the advantage of the other.

Property will lose a certain attribute which sanctifies it now. The absolute ownership of it-"the right to use or abuse"-will be abolished, and possession, use, will be the only title. It will be seen how impossible it would be for one person to "own" a million acres of land, without a title deed, backed by a government ready to protect the title at all hazards, even to the loss of thousands of lives. He could not use the million acres himself, nor could he wrest from its depths the possible resources it contains.

People have become so used to seeing the evidences of authority on every hand that most of them honestly believe that they would go utterly to the bad if it were not for the policeman's club or the soldier's bayonet. But the anarchist says, "Remove these evidence of brute force, and let man feel the revivifying influences of self responsibility and self control, and see how we will respond to these better influences."

The belief in a literal place of torment has nearly melted away; and instead of the direful results predicted, we have a higher and truer standard of manhood and womanhood. People do not care to go to the bad when they find they can as well as not. Individuals are unconscious of their own motives in doing good. While acting out their natures according to their surroundings and conditions, they still believe they are being kept in the right path by some outside power, some restraint thrown around them by church or state. So the objector believes that with the right to rebel and secede, sacred to him, he would forever be rebelling and seceding, thereby creating constant confusion and turmoil. Is it probable that he would, merely for the reason that he could do so? Men are to a great extent creatures of habit, and grow to love associations; under reasonably good conditions, he would remain where he commences, if he wished to, and, if he did

not, who has any natural right to force him into relations distasteful to him? Under the present order of affairs, persons do unite with societies and remain good, disinterested members for life, where the right to retire is always conceded.

What we anarchists contend for is a larger opportunity to develop the units in society, that mankind may possess the right as a sound being to develop that which is broadest, noblest, highest and best, unhandicapped by any centralized authority, where he shall have to wait for his permits to be signed, sealed, approved and handed down to him before he can engage in the active pursuits of life with his fellow being. We know that after all, as we grow more enlightened under this larger liberty, we will grow to care less and less for that exact distribution of material wealth, which, in our greed-nurtured senses, seems now so impossible to think upon carelessly. The man and woman of loftier intellects, in the present, think not so much of the riches to be gained by their efforts as of the good they can do for their fellow creatures. There is an innate spring of healthy action in every human being who has not been crushed and pinched by poverty and drudgery from before his birth, that impels him onward and upward. He cannot be idle, if he would; it is as natural for him to develop, expand, and use the powers within him when no repressed, as it is for the rose to bloom in the sunlight and fling its fragrance on the passing breeze.

The grandest works of the past were never performed for the sake of money. Who can measure the worth of a Shakespeare, an Angelo or Beethoven in dollars and cents? Agassiz said, "he had no time to make money," there were higher and better objects in life than that. And so will it be when humanity is once relieved from the pressing fear of starvation, want, and slavery, it will be concerned, less and less, about the ownership of vast accumulations of wealth. Such possessions would be but an annoyance and trouble. When two or three or four hours a day of easy, of healthful labor will produce all the comforts and luxuries one can use, and the opportunity to labor is never denied, people will become indifferent as to who owns the wealth they do not need. Wealth will be below par, and it will be found that men and women will not accept it for pay, or be bribed by it to do what they would not willingly and naturally do without it. Some higher incentive must, and will, supersede the greed for gold. The involuntary aspiration born in man to make the most of one's self, to be loved and appreciated by one's fellow-beings, to "make the world better for having lived in it," will urge him on the nobler deeds than ever the sordid and selfish incentive of material gain has done.

If, in the present chaotic and shameful struggle for existence, when organized society offers a premium on greed, cruelty, and deceit, men can be found who stand aloof and almost alone in their determination to work for good rather than gold, who suffer want and persecution rather than desert principle, who can

bravely walk to the scaffold for the good they can do humanity, what may we expect from men when freed from the grinding necessity of selling the better part of themselves for bread? The terrible conditions under which labor is performed, the awful alternative if one does not prostitute talent and morals in the service of mammon; and the power acquired with the wealth obtained by ever so unjust means, combined to make the conception of free and voluntary labor almost an impossible one. And yet, there are examples of this principle even now. In a well bred family each person has certain duties, which are performed cheerfully, and are not measured out and paid for according to some pre-determined standard; when the united members sit down to the well-filled table, the stronger do not scramble to get the most, while the weakest do without, or gather greedily around them more food than they can possibly consume. Each patiently and politely awaits his turn to be served, and leaves what he does not want; he is certain that when again hungry plenty of good food will be provided. This principle can be extended to include all society, when people are civilized enough to wish it.

Again, the utter impossibility of awarding to each an exact return for the amount of labor performed will render absolute communism a necessity sooner or later. The land and all it contains, without which labor cannot be exerted, belong to no one man, but to all alike. The inventions and discoveries of the past are the common inheritance of the coming generations; and when a man takes the tree that nature furnished free, and fashions it into a useful article, or a machine perfected and bequeathed to him by many past generations, who is to determine what proportion is his and his alone? Primitive man would have been a week fashioning a rude resemblance to the article with his clumsy tools, where the modern worker has occupied an hour. The finished article is of far more real value than the rude one made long ago, and yet the primitive man toiled the longest and hardest. Who can determine with exact justice what is each one's due? There must come a time when we will cease trying. The earth is so bountiful, so generous; man's brain is so active, his hands so restless, that wealth will spring like magic, ready for the use of the world's inhabitants. We will become as much ashamed to quarrel over its possession as we are now to squabble over the food spread before us on a loaded table. "But all this," the objector urges, "is very beautiful in the far off future, when we become angels. It would not do now to abolish governments and legal restraints; people are not prepared for it."

This is a question. We have seen, in reading history, that wherever an old-time restriction has been removed the people have not abused their newer liberty. Once it was considered necessary to compel men to save their souls, with the aid of governmental scaffolds, church racks and stakes. Until the foundation of the American republic it was considered absolutely essential that governments should second the efforts of the church in forcing people to attend the means of grace;

and yet it is found that the standard of morals among the masses is raised since they are left free to pray as they see fit, or not at all, if they prefer it. It was believed the chattel slaves would not work if the overseer and whip were removed; they are so much more a source of profit now that ex-slave owners would not return to the old system if they could.

So many able writers have shown that the unjust institutions which work so much misery and suffering to the masses have their root in governments, and owe their whole existence to the power derived from government we cannot help but believe that were every law, every title deed, every court, and every police officer or soldier abolished tomorrow with one sweep, we would be better off than now. The actual, material things that man needs would still exist; his strength and skill would remain and his instinctive social inclinations retain their force and the resources of life made free to all the people that they would need no force but that of society and the opinion of fellow beings to keep them moral and upright.

Freed from the systems that made him wretched before, he is not likely to make himself more wretched for lack of them. Much more is contained in the thought that conditions make man what he is, and not the laws and penalties made for his guidance, than is supposed by careless observation. We have laws, jails, courts, armies, guns and armories enough to make saints of us all, if they were the true preventives of crime; but we know they do not prevent crime; that wickedness and depravity exist in spite of them, nay, increase as the struggle between classes grows fiercer, wealth greater and more powerful and poverty more gaunt and desperate.

To the governing class the anarchists say: "Gentlemen, we ask no privilege, we propose no restriction; nor, on the other hand, will we permit it. We have no new shackles to propose, we seek emancipation from shackles. We ask no legislative sanction, for co-operation asks only for a free field and no favors; neither will we permit their interference." (?) It asserts that in freedom of the social unit lies the freedom of the social state. It asserts that in freedom to possess and utilize soil lie social happiness and progress and the death of rent. It asserts that order can only exist where liberty prevails, and that progress leads and never follows order. It asserts, finally, that this emancipation will inaugurate liberty, equality, fraternity. That the existing industrial system has outgrown its usefulness, if it ever had any is I believe admitted by all who have given serious thought to this phase of social conditions.

The manifestations of discontent now looming upon every side show that society is conducted on wrong principles and that something has got to be done soon or the wage class will sink into a slavery worse than was the feudal serf. I say to the

wage class: Think clearly and act quickly, or you are lost. Strike not for a few cents more an hour, because the price of living will be raised faster still, but strike for all you earn, be content with nothing less.

The twentieth anniversary of the 11th of November, which has just been observed in Chicago, was a great success from many standpoints, notably among which was the increased number of young people who took part in it. . . .

As these years speed by, our comrades' lives will be better understood; their great work for the uplifting of humanity understood and appreciated. This has been the case of the martyrs of all ages....

"THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE" WILL YET BE HEARD.

The Demonstrator
November 20, 1907

It is now 18 months since I published the [Famous Speeches of the Haymarket Martyrs]. In that time I have traveled from Los Angeles, Wa Vancouver, B.C., to New York city, twice. I have devoted my entire energies to visiting Locals of the AF of L. From those Locals I have received most courteous treatment everywhere. I have credentials from some of the best known central bodies in this country, including the Central Federated Union of New York city. I am continually rapping at the doors of Locals, being admitted and selling the speeches. The result is that I have sold 10,000 copies and am just going to place my order with the printer for the sixth edition, making 12,000. I regard these speeches as the greatest piece of propaganda literature extant; and when circulated among organized labor are bound to bear fruit.

The Agitator
December, 15, 1911

The Haymarket meeting is referred to historically as "The Haymarket Anarchists' Riot." There was no riot at the Haymarket except a police riot. Mayor Harrison attended the Haymarket meeting, and took the stand at the anarchist trial for the defense, not for the state. The great strike of May 1886 was an historical event of great importance, inasmuch as it was . . . the first time that the workers themselves had attempted to get a shorter workday by united, simultaneous

action.... This strike was the first in the nature of Direct Action on a large scale. . . . Of course the eight-hour day is as antiquated as the craft unions themselves. Today we should be agitating for a five-hour workday.

The Industrial Worker

May 1, 1912

The Eleventh of November has become a day of international importance, cherished in the hearts of all true lovers of Liberty as a day of martyrdom. On that day was offered to the gallows-tree martyrs as true to their ideal as ever were sacrificed in any age.... Our comrades were not murdered by the state because they had any connection with the bombthrowing, but because they were active in organizing the wage-slaves. The capitalist class didn't want to find the bombthrower; this class foolishly believed that by putting to death the active spirits of the labor movement of the time, it could frighten the working class back to slavery.

The Agitator

November 1, 1912

Parsons, Spies, Lingg, Fischer and Engel: Although all that is mortal of you is laid beneath that beautiful monument in Waldheim Cemetery, you are not dead. You are just beginning to live in the hearts of all true lovers of liberty. For now, after forty years that you are gone, thousands who were then unborn are eager to learn of your lives and heroic martyrdom, and as the years lengthen the brighter will shine your names, and the more you will come to be appreciated and loved. Those who so foully murdered you, under the forms of law - lynch law - in a court of supposed justice, are forgotten. Rest, comrades, rest. All the tomorrows are yours!

The Labor Defender

November 1926

Once again on November 11 a memorial meeting will be held to commemorate the death of the Chicago Haymarket martyrs. 1937 is the fiftieth anniversary, and this meeting bids fair to be more widely observed than any of the forty-nine previous ones. . . . On that gloomy morning of November 11, 1887, I took our two little children to jail to bid my beloved husband farewell. I found the jail roped off with heavy cables. Policemen with pistols walked in the inclosure. I asked them to allow us to go to our loved one before they murdered him. They said nothing. Then I said, "Let these children bid their father good-bye; let them receive his blessing. They can do no harm." In a few minutes a patrol-wagon drove up and

we were locked up in a police station while the hellish deed was done. Oh, Misery, I have drunk thy cup of sorrow to its dregs, but I am still a rebel.

The One Big Union Monthly

November 1937

SPEECH TO THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD (IWW), (1905)

Lucy Parsons addressed the founding convention on two occasions and her speeches touched on issues close to her heart: the oppression of women and how to develop radical new tactics to win strikes. Her ideas clearly were in advance of the time, presage the "sit-in" strikes of the 1930s, the anti-war movement of the 1960s, and her words resonate today. Delegate applause interrupted her speech several times and at the end.

We, the women of this country, have no ballot even if we wished to use it, and the only way that we can be represented is to take a man to represent us. You men have made such a mess of it in representing us that we have not much confidence in asking you . . . We [women] are the slaves of slaves. We are exploited more ruthlessly than men. Whenever wages are to be reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them, and if there is anything that you men should do in the future it is to organize the women. . . . Now, what do we mean when we say revolutionary Socialist? We mean that the land shall belong to the landless, the tools to the toiler, and the products to the producers. . . . I believe that if every man and every woman who works, or who toils in the mines, mills, the workshops, the fields, the factories and the farms of our broad America should decide in their minds that they shall have that which of right belongs to them, and that no idler shall live upon their toil . . . then there is no army that is large enough to overcome you, for you yourselves constitute the army

My conception of the strike of the future is not to strike and go out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production. Let us sink such differences as nationality, religion, politics, and set our eyes eternally and forever toward the rising star of the industrial republic of labor; remembering that we have left the old behind and have set our faces toward the future. There is no power on earth that can stop men and women who are determined to be free at all hazards. There is no power on earth so great as the power of intellect. It moves the world and it moves the earth. . . .

I hope even now to live to see the day when the first dawn of the new era of labor will have arisen, when capitalism will be a thing of the past, and the new industrial republic, the commonwealth of labor, shall be in operation. I thank you.

TO TRAMPS, THE UNEMPLOYED, THE DISINHERITED, AND MISERABLE.

A word to the 35,000 now tramping the streets of this great city, with hands in pockets, gazing listlessly about you at the evidence of wealth and pleasure of which you own no part, not sufficient even to purchase yourself a bit of food with which to appease the pangs of hunger now gnawing at your vitals. It is with you and the hundreds of thousands of others similarly situated in this great land of plenty, that I wish to have a word.

Have you not worked hard all your life, since you were old enough for your labor to be of use in the production of wealth? Have you not toiled long, hard and laboriously in producing wealth? And in all those years of drudgery do you not know you have produced thousand upon thousands of dollars' worth of wealth, which you did not then, do not now, and unless you ACT, never will, own any part in? Do you not know that when you were harnessed to a machine and that machine harnessed to steam, and thus you toiled your 10, 12 and 16 hours in the 24, that during this time in all these years you received only enough of your labor product to furnish yourself the bare, coarse necessities of life, and that when you wished to purchase anything for yourself and family it always had to be of the cheapest quality? If you wanted to go anywhere you had to wait until Sunday, so little did you receive for your unremitting toil that you dare not stop for a moment, as it were? And do you not know that with all your squeezing, pinching and economizing you never were enabled to keep but a few days ahead of the wolves of want? And that at last when the caprice of your employer saw fit to create an artificial famine by limiting production, that the fires in the furnace were extinguished, the iron horse to which you had been harnessed was stilled; the factory door locked up, you turned upon the highway a tramp, with hunger in your stomach and rags upon your back? Yet your employer told you that it was overproduction which made him close up. Who cared for the bitter tears and heart-pangs of your loving wife and helpless children, when you bid them a loving "God bless you" and turned upon the tramp's road to seek employment elsewhere? I say, who cared for those heartaches and pains? You were only a tramp now, to be execrated and denounced as a "worthless tramp and a vagrant"

by that very class who had been engaged all those years in robbing you and yours. Then can you not see that the "good boss" or the "bad boss" cuts no figure whatever? that you are the common prey of both, and that their mission is simply robbery? Can you not see that it is the INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM and not the "boss" which must be changed?

Now, when all these bright summer and autumn days are going by and you have no employment, and consequently can save up nothing, and when the winter's blast sweeps down from the north and all the earth is wrapped in a shroud of ice, hearken not to the voice of the hypocrite who will tell you that it was ordained of God that "the poor ye have always"; or to the arrogant robber who will say to you that you "drank up all your wages last summer when you had work, and that is the reason why you have nothing now, and the workhouse or the workyard is too good for you; that you ought to be shot." And shoot you they will if you present your petitions in too emphatic a manner. So hearken not to them, but list! Next winter when the cold blasts are creeping through the rents in your seedy garments, when the frost is biting your feet through the holes in your worn-out shoes, and when all wretchedness seems to have centered in and upon you, when misery has marked you for her own and life has become a burden and existence a mockery, when you have walked the streets by day and slept upon hard boards by night, and at last determine by your own hand to take your life, - for you would rather go out into utter nothingness than to longer endure an existence which has become such a burden - so, perchance, you determine to dash yourself into the cold embrace of the lake rather than longer suffer thus. But halt, before you commit this last tragic act in the drama of your simple existence. Stop! Is there nothing you can do to insure those whom you are about to orphan, against a like fate? The waves will only dash over you in mockery of your rash act; but stroll you down the avenues of the rich and look through the magnificent plate windows into their voluptuous homes, and here you will discover the *very identical robbers* who have despoiled you and yours. Then let your tragedy be enacted *here!* Awaken them from their wanton sport at your expense! Send forth your petition and let them read it by the red glare of destruction. Thus when you cast "one long lingering look behind" you can be assured that you have spoken to these robbers in the only language which they have ever been able to understand, for they have never yet deigned to notice any petition from their slaves that they were not *compelled* to read by the red glare bursting from the cannon's mouths, or that was not handed to them upon the point of the sword. You need no organization when you make up your mind to present this kind of petition. In fact, an organization would be a detriment to you; but each of you hungry tramps who read these lines, avail yourselves of those little methods of warfare which Science has placed in the hands of the poor man, and you will become a power in this or any other land. *Learn the use of explosives!*

Lucy Parsons (1853-1942)



"Lucy Parsons' personae and historical role provide material for the makings of a truly exemplary figure.....anarchist, labor organizer, writer, editor, publisher, and dynamic speaker, a woman of color of mixed Black, Mexican and Native American heritage, a founder of the 1880s Chicago Working Women's Union and) co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)."

Unfortunately the vast array of writings, speeches and other accounts of Lucy Parsons' commitment to the

movements she was a part of are far and few between. Much of her writings for the *Alarm*, her personal journals, letters and other history burned with Lucy when her house caught fire and ended her life in 1942. The remaining letters, writings and other documents of Lucy Parsons were promptly confiscated and eliminated by the authorities. This pamphlet contains a few of her preserved writings and speeches.